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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005335

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TREASURY PASS TO FRB SAN FRANCISCO/TERESA CURRAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: ALLEGED BOMB PLOT: MILITARY ON DEFENSIVE

REF: A. BANGKOK 5228

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5204

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 4610

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Army lieutenant arrested August 24 has given a confusing statement expressing contrition but saying that he did not know there was a large bomb in the car he was driving. He refuses to name anyone else in connection with the incident. The Prime Minister has insisted that, in light of the bomb attack, he must have trusted military officers close to him moved into key positions, especially in Bangkok. The government does not seem to be making a strong case that the bomb attack was a real threat to the PM. The PM's intervention in the military assignments process is another measure that will exacerbate tensions between the PM and the military. END SUMMARY.

2.(C) In the wake of the alleged assassination attempt of August 24, two stories predominate. The first is the stream of often contradictory information about the arrested driver, Lt. Thawatchai Klinchana and other aspects of the investigation. The second is the Prime Minister's decision to use the incident as the basis for insisting that some of the military officers he trusts (former fellow students from the pre-Cadet Academy) be placed in key positions, particularly around Bangkok.

THE POLICE INVESTIGATION

[1](#)3. (C) The police have released the results of a interview with Army Lieutenant Thawatchai Klinchana, arrested as the driver of the car bomb found on August 24. On August 28, the police showed the press a video in which Thawatchai said that he "took responsibility" for driving the car and that he would not say who had told him to drive it, since "he was a soldier and would keep promises." He said, "What I did was wrong, and I felt so sorry when I came to learn that the car was loaded with a deadly bomb. I have the feeling that the Siam Thewatirat (the guardian spirit of Bangkok) really exists, making the bomb not explode... I confess to having driven the car that caused the problem. Originally, I was just told to drive the car to park. Nothing else. Nothing. When I came to learn that there was a deadly bomb, I thought to myself, what have I done?" He also said, "If the bomb had gone off, an enormous number of people would have suffered and I would carry the sin for my whole life."

14. (C) According to the police, the driver has also confessed to driving the same car on August 22 and 23, but this statement is not shown on the video. According to some reports, the police are trying to link the driver to an "accident" that occurred earlier in the month affecting the PM's motorcade; some reports are now casting that "accident" as an attempt to injure or kill the PM. Police searched the residence of another low-ranking military officer today and the government claims that at least two more military officers may be involved, identified only as "Col. S." and "Lt. Col. M." None of these suspects has been picked up yet, as far as we know. The police are forecasting further arrests.

15. (C) Meanwhile, the media continue to question many aspects of the initial police report. The police statement that the bomb would have brought down the overpass under which the car was parked, and would have caused damage for a square kilometer, has been questioned. It is unclear to everyone how the driver could have driven the car around not knowing that there was a bomb in it, but the bomb squad was able to see the bomb in the back seat. Informally, most military contacts express skepticism about the whole story, but police are loudly proclaiming that they thwarted a real threat.

MILITARY RESHUFFLE LIST

16. (C) The military, already concerned about the implication of its officers in the "bomb plot," got more bad news early this week. The PM's former classmates from the pre-cadet academy approached Thaksin following the discovery of the bomb to express their concern for his safety. (Note: Thaksin

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studied to be a policeman together with students destined for the military in the pre-cadet academy. These high-school groupings usually give rise to extremely strong class loyalty, and the expectation that those who do well will help out their colleagues. Thaksin is a member of Class 10, and he has supported his classmates to help them rise quickly in the military bureaucracy. End note.) Thaksin subsequently told military and government officials that, due to the bomb, he wanted to reexamine some of the military assignment decisions recently agreed, and now insisted on putting some of his classmates into key positions, especially in the Bangkok area. Details of the PM's request have been reported widely in the press, and a variety of US embassy sources confirm the press reports are substantially correct.

7 (C) The annual military reshuffle is an extremely important event, in which military officers contend for the assignments that keep their careers advancing. Military officers may be moved every year as they move up in rank and responsibility. The military leadership believes that it should have the authority to decide on assignments -- all the way up to the highest offices -- without "political interference." In fact, there is often some influence by the government or Privy Council to advance favorites. However, the military has been particularly unhappy with the reported efforts of the PM to advance his classmates (ref c). We understood that, after some quiet negotiation, a list had recently been decided, and was beginning to go through the formal approval process: getting government approval, then to the Privy Council, then to the King for signature. Allegedly, some of Thaksin's proteges had not done as well as they had hoped. According to the reports circulating, Thaksin is now insisting that his classmates assume key positions for security in the Bangkok area, like the 1st Army commander and the Royal Guard (1st Division) commander.

COMMENT

18. (C) We still do not have enough information to reach a

conclusion about who was behind the car bomb and what their goal was. The government is not doing a good job making its case that it was a serious assassination attempt. The arrested driver certainly does not sound like suicide bomber or assassin. The immediate move by the PM to seize an advantage and put his classmates in some important positions can be interpreted two ways, like most of what has happened so far. Either it's a cynical manipulation to play up the alleged bomb to get concessions from the military the PM couldn't get before. Or, it's a prudent step to have friends watching his back during a dangerous time. In either case, it will exacerbate the negative view that much of the military now has of the PM, and contribute to already rising tensions.

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